

## **Moving Great Lakes Restoration Forward Through a Comprehensive Protection and Restoration Strategy**

### ***H.R. 4416 will improve coordination and planning through a stakeholder task force***

The Great Lakes are a national treasure that we need to protect and restore. They contain 95 percent of our nation's surface freshwater, provide drinking water to millions of people and form the backbone for billions of dollars in shipping, trade, fishing and recreation. Progress has been made in improving environmental conditions in the Great Lakes, but they continue to face many threats, including pollution from contaminated sediments, stormwater and agricultural runoff, the introduction of invasive species, and wetlands and coastal habitat loss.

Several federal, state, provincial and local programs have been developed to address these problems, but they strategies are not well coordinated. According to an April 2003 GAO Report, "no one overarching strategy or plan unifies these strategies in the pursuit of a common goal... An overarching strategy for the basin is needed to establish restoration goals, outline how restoration will occur, identify the resources needed to achieve restoration, assign accountability for restoration, and provide a mechanism for measuring progress for achieving goals."

The Great Lakes Protection and Restoration Committee Act will provide a path forward by bringing together all of the stakeholders in the basin, led by the Great Lakes State governors and comprised of relevant federal agency officials, tribal representatives, scientific experts and environmental and industry stakeholders. The Committee created by the legislation will develop a specific and comprehensive strategy for moving forward with Great Lakes protection and restoration.

Specifically, the task force will:

- ✓ Assess accomplishments from current programs over the past 10 years
- ✓ Analyze the prospects for achieving restoration goals under current programs and authorities for the next 10 years
- ✓ Prioritize restoration goals identified by the Great Lakes governors
- ✓ Develop specific, measurable benchmarks for achieving those goals
- ✓ Recommend legislative options for obtaining such additional authority and funding as are necessary to achieve those goals
- ✓ Suggest methods to improve coordination among the existing federal, state, provincial, local, and non-governmental programs operating in the Great Lakes.

This serious and measured approach mirrors the steps taken in other large ecosystem restoration projects such as the Everglades and Chesapeake Bay. Due to the complexity of those restoration initiatives, which crossed over many jurisdictional lines, environmental challenges and scientific disciplines, it was essential to have an overall strategic plan in place to guide activities and funding decisions over long periods of time. The Great Lakes Basin is significantly larger and the environmental challenges substantially more complex than in those ecosystems. That is why we need an overarching strategy in place.

A lack of adequate funding is certainly an impediment to successful cleanup efforts, but improved program coordination under a comprehensive strategic plan is an essential step. **The Great Lakes Protection and Restoration Committee Act will move Great Lakes restoration forward to help protect and clean up this global treasure.**